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Libyan Military Termed Restive Under Qaddafi

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TRIPOLI, Libya, Jan. 13 — Growing discontent within the Libyan armed forces has presented Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi with one of the most politically sensitive challenges in his 16-year rule, according to diplomats and Libyan officials.

The officials and diplomats attributed the restiveness, particularly within the army, to efforts by Colonel Qaddafi to create "armed masses." They also cited the country's deepening economic crisis as a factor.

The malaise is said to have deepened since what is believed to have been the slaying on Nov. 23 or Nov. 24 of Col. Hassan Ishkal, the third most powerful man in Libya's Government and head of the military region of Sirte. The death of Colonel Ishkal, a distant cousin of Colonel Qaddafi, was described as a blow to the professional officer corps, whose benefits and prerogatives Colonel Ishkal staunchly defended.

Rumors About the Death

His death has been officially attributed to a car accident on the road between Sirte and Tripoli, but there has been a flood of rumors about the place and circumstances of his demise.

According to one version widely cited by Libyans and by diplomats of other nations, Colonel Ishkal, who accompanied Mr. Qaddafi on his visit to the Soviet Union in October, was killed at the Bab el-Azziziya military barracks after he went there to protest a decision by Colonel Qaddafi to strip him of rank.

Colonel Ishkal, whose wife is Egyptian, had been vehemently opposed to what he saw as Libya's provocative policy towards Egypt, as well as to the growth of influence within the military of the Revolutionary Guards and Revolutionary Committees, civilian watchdogs whose role has been bolstered by Colonel Qaddafi.

According to these accounts, Colonel Ishkal was killed by gunfire at or near the military barracks. It is not known what role, if any, Colonel Qaddafi played in the incident.

A third version, spread by the Libyan authorities to allay unrest in the officer corps, was that Colonel Ishkal, who was 47 years old, had committed suicide. However a post-mortem indicated that he had been shot at least six times, Libyans and diplomats said.

What seems clear is that his death has enhanced the standing of Maj. Abdel Salam Jalloud, the No. 2 figure in Libya. Both Major Jalloud and Colonel Qaddafi were said to have favored the measures that Colonel Ishkal opposed — principally the continued shrinkage of privileges for the army and a growing role for the Revolutionary Committees and Guards. These are made up of civilians who have penetrated even the hallowed ranks of the military, which staged the bloodless coup that overthrew King Idris in 1969.

In an interview last week, Colonel Qaddafi stressed his determination to replace the professional military eventually with his "armed people."

Another blow to the prestige of the military was said to have been Colonel Qaddafi's decision to cancel, for the first time, the annual military parade that marks the Sept. 1 anniversary of the coup.

Instead, the Colonel gave a major speech in the oasis town of Sebha to members of the Revolutionary Guards and Committees, praising them as the main "pillar of the revolution."

Watching Over the Army

According to one diplomat, the Revolutionary Guards, a vanguard composed of an estimated 1,000 to 2,000 young Libyans who have had paramilitary training, and many of whom come from Col. Qaddafi's tribe in Sirte, have only light weapons and hence are no match for the army. However, they have installed themselves as watchdogs at almost every army post and barracks, Libyans said, even at the Bab el-Azziziya installation, which is Colonel Qaddafi's base. Revolutionary guards now control the distribution of live ammunition at the bases, one well-placed diplomat said.

Diplomats say the Revolutionary Committees and Guards began to grow in numbers and influence shortly after 12 men attacked the Bab el-Azziziya barracks on May 8, 1984, in an attempt

to kill Colonel Qaddafi. The 12 were killed, but diplomats here at the time said revolutionary guards and Revolutionary Committee members set up roadblocks and arrested some 2,000 Libyans suspected of involvement.

Western intelligence sources said there were two other coup attempts, involving elements from each branch of the military, in March or April of 1985. The first was an attempt by conservative officers to kill Colonel Qaddafi at one of his villas on the outskirts of Tripoli. The second was an assault on a convoy in which he was traveling. The colonel was not hurt in either attempt, the sources said, but the incidents heightened his mistrust of the military.

In addition to resenting the growing power of civilians in the military, the diplomats and others said, professional

officers have resented the decline in their living standards due to a fall in Libyan income from \$22 billion in 1980 to between \$8 billion and \$9 billion last year.

Colonel Ishkal had reportedly favored slashing investments in other sectors to solve the economic crisis, which he saw as potentially destabilizing within the military, diplomats said. But Colonel Qaddafi and Major Jalloud, who now supervises both the Revolutionary Guards and Revolutionary Committees, have preferred to use the economic crisis to speed up the revolution and to justify drastic actions — such as increasing the role of the revolutionary vanguards — that might not have been acceptable before the chronic shortages began last spring.